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MIDDLE EAST FORUM FOR THE FUTURE PRODUCES CONCRETE INITIATIVES

Leaders endorse projects for political, economic and educational reform

By David Shelby
Washington File Staff Writer

Rabat, Morocco -- The inaugural gathering of the Forum for the Future concluded December 11 with the participants calling for concrete steps towards implementing various proposals aimed at creating greater economic development, political participation and educational opportunities in the broader Middle East and North Africa.

The summary statement called for the Forum to provide "an informal, flexible, open and inclusive dialogue, devoted to strengthening democracy and the participation of civil society, to developing skills training, and to encouraging the growth of modern economies that generate wealth and that are well integrated into the global economy."

Foreign ministers and finance ministers of the countries in the region stretching from Morocco to Pakistan as well as from the countries of the G8 met with business leaders and civil society representatives from the broader Middle East at the Forum gathering in Rabat.

The leaders discussed several reform and development initiatives brought forward by the countries of the region.

Turkey, Yemen and Italy proposed creation of a Democracy Assistance Dialogue to promote consolidation of democratic institutions in the region. The participants welcomed this initiative and affirmed their commitment to working with civil society representatives in their countries to create a solid foundation for democratic reforms.

The participants also called for a stronger regional commitment to education and the elimination of illiteracy. Algeria and Afghanistan offered to sponsor a literacy workshop in Algeria in early 2005. Jordan also offered to host a May 2005 meeting of the education ministers from the region to discuss literacy training, curricula upgrades and strategies to improve educational administration.

Both Morocco and Bahrain put forward plans to establish regional centers for entrepreneurial excellence. These institutions would provide business training aimed at creating a highly qualified cadre of young entrepreneurs and business professionals in the region.

Jordan and Japan presented a proposal to hold a workshop on vocational training in order to discuss strategies for equipping the region's workforce with the skills demanded by the global economy.

The participants endorsed ongoing economic reforms in the countries of the region and stated the need for continued progress in establishing free trade areas.

Bahrain proposed creation of a regional Network of Funds to improve financial flows for socio-economic development. The Arab Monetary Fund will pursue this initiative in coordination with other financial institutions from the region and the G8 countries (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States).

The participants welcomed creation of a region-specific private enterprise development fund at the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The fund is designed to provide technical support and financial assistance to small private enterprises in the broader Middle East and North Africa region. The participants set an initial funding goal of \$100 million for the IFC facility. To date, various countries and the Islamic Development Bank have pledged a total of \$60 million.

In an effort to extend financial opportunities to the economically disadvantaged, Jordan has offered to establish a Microfinance Training Center to work with non-gov-

ernmental organizations that engage in providing small loans to entrepreneurs who would not be able to obtain financial support from ordinary banks.

The government officials also endorsed the conclusions of the business dialogue group stating the need to establish higher standards of governance in the region, including greater transparency, respect for property rights, the rule of law and effective, independent judiciaries.

The leaders agreed to move forward with the proposed initiatives and will meet again at the second Forum for the Future meeting in Manama, Bahrain, in November 2005 to assess the progress that has been made. In the meantime, the majority of the group's foreign ministers will have another opportunity to discuss the implementation of reform and development plans at a March 2005 meeting of the G8 and Arab League ministers in Cairo.

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell said that while the initiatives discussed were not necessarily a radical departure from previously existing bilateral and multilateral programs, the Forum for the Future "is way of bringing it all together and coming up with a solid plan of what the needs are for each of these countries." He added that in this way, the various efforts underway and the new initiatives being undertaken could feed into a "common agenda."

MIDDLE EAST REFORM FORUM ACCOMPLISHMENTS LISTED IN FACT SHEET

Participants agree on number of further steps

Following is a fact sheet issued by the State Department December 11 on the accomplishments of the first Forum for the Future, held in Morocco, for supporting political and economic reforms in the region stretching from Morocco to Pakistan:

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Office of the Spokesman
(Rabat, Morocco)

ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF THE FIRST FORUM FOR FUTURE, RABAT 2004

"... the Forum for the Future hopes to provide a setting for an informal, flexible, open and inclusive dialogue, devoted to strengthening democracy and the participa-

tion of civil society, to developing skills training, and to encouraging the growth of modern economies that generate wealth and that are well integrated into the global economy.”

Rabat Chairs' Summary

“We share a confidence in the creativity and talent of the peoples of the region. The region is full of talented, hopeful people... We must rely on this shared confidence in people to make participation in public and political life more inclusive in every country.”

Secretary of State Colin L. Powell

The first Forum for the Future convened on December 11, 2004, in Rabat, Morocco. The Forum for the Future is a partnership among the countries of the Broader Middle East and North Africa (BMENA) region, the Group of Eight (G-8) industrialized democracies, and others, all united around a common agenda that advances the universal values of human dignity, democracy, economic opportunity, and social justice. In Rabat, Foreign, Finance, and Economy Ministers from 28 countries gathered to discuss and develop collaborative efforts to support political, economic, and social reform in the BMENA region. Civil society and business representatives also participated in the Forum.

Forum participants agreed to expand their already strong cooperation in support of the region's reform efforts, and endorsed the following actions:

-- Democracy Assistance Dialogue: The Dialogue's participants will focus in 2005 on, among other things, providing electoral assistance, improving the role of women, and advancing relations between the region's governments and civil society, through programs and projects supporting democratization and public participation.

-- Literacy: To advance the region's efforts to halve the illiteracy rate over the next decade and improve education, especially for girls and women, Forum participants will develop a literacy plan of action for the region and convene a meeting of Education Ministers in May 2005 in Jordan.

-- International Finance: Recognizing that the private sector is the engine of economic growth and job creation, Forum participants established the International Finance Corporation's Private Enterprise Partnership for the Middle East and North Africa facility to support small and medium-sized enterprises. They have already contributed over \$60 million of the \$100 million goal for the

facility. Forum participants also welcomed the proposal for a Network of Funds to improve the effectiveness of official financing in the region.

-- Entrepreneurship: Morocco and Bahrain, working with other Forum participants, will establish two entrepreneurship centers in 2005 to provide the region's young people with opportunities and skills they will need to succeed professionally.

-- Microfinance: Working with the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor (CGAP), Forum participants have established a microfinance consultative group and will open a technical hub and microfinance training center in 2005 in Jordan. CGAP is also working with Yemen and other countries in the region on developing microfinance projects to assist the region's small entrepreneurs, especially women.

-- Investment: The Investment Task Force, a private sector, CEO-led group, will focus on increasing investment in the region to spur economic growth and create jobs. The Task Force will work with the region's governments and the OECD to remove impediments to investment, including those related to governance.

The Forum participants agreed to meet in Bahrain in November 2005 to review progress on these and other reform efforts and continue expanding their partnership in support of the region's political, economic, and social progress.

U.S. HAS LONG COMMITMENT TO HUMANITARIAN, TRAINING ASSISTANCE

Programs have built strong friendships, mutual understanding

A LONG TRADITION OF COOPERATION AND SUPPORT

Colonel George Topic
Professor, National Defense University

One of America's most strongly held values is its enduring commitment to assist other nations and to develop strong ties with U.S. friends and allies through coopera-

tive education, training, and humanitarian assistance programs. Over the past 60 years, a wide variety of activities have built strong friendships and promoted mutual understanding at all levels around the world.

Since the end of World War II, the Department of Defense has been deeply involved in humanitarian assistance efforts. And over the past six decades these activities have consistently been an important part of the U.S. national security strategy. The Marshall Plan, the Berlin Airlift, and numerous other activities have all contributed to the strong network of alliances, coalitions, and friendships that have helped to promote cooperation, avoid conflict, and, above all to ease the pain and suffering of those in need.

The legal foundation for much of the Defense Department's work is based in the Mutual Security Act of 1954. Throughout the Cold War period, the U.S. military worked closely with the State Department, other government agencies, and various nations and international organizations to provide support for development efforts as well as disaster relief. Thousands of U.S. military personnel have been involved in efforts in virtually every nation. The range of activities includes famine relief, disaster response, and timely preventive action taken to head off impending crises. The major efforts the United States undertook in response to Hurricane Mitch in the Caribbean, and after the eruption of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines, are representative examples of hundreds of similar operations undertaken all over the globe.

LOGISTICS AND TRANSPORT

Exceptional U.S. military logistics and strategic transport capabilities are tailor-made for ready humanitarian assistance service. In addition to the ability to move significant cargo into some of the most remote places on earth, airdrop capabilities enable the United States to provide critical supplies rapidly in disasters where victims are cut off completely from the rest of the world. In addition, U.S. military medical personnel have critical tactical training that enables them to operate literally under any conditions -- a skill often needed in support of humanitarian operations. As a concrete example of a logistics success, the U.S. Army provided water purification support in the mid-1990s to over a million refugees in central Africa -- a truly challenging deployment location. The U.S. military's flexible, responsive leadership ability and fluid command-and-control systems also make a difference. The best example was the 1st Marine Expe-

ditionary Force's 1991 mid-ocean diversion in support of Operation Sea Angel in Bangladesh. Already in the process of redeploying after Operation Desert Storm, the Marines were called upon to assist in the wake of a typhoon that killed over 130,000 people. Their speed and effectiveness, along with those of many other governmental and international organizations, are credited with saving tens of thousands of lives. The plans for the operation were drafted on the go as the Marines were steaming into the Bay of Bengal to initiate relief operations.

The Foreign Assistance Act of 1961 provided the guidance and funding under which many humanitarian assistance programs have thrived over the past 40 years. Military units have deployed to refurbish medical facilities; build schools, wells, and roads, and to provide sanitation, preventive medicine, and medical assistance under the provisions of this legislation. These programs are carried out through the coordination and leadership of the in-country U.S. ambassador and his or her country team.

EXCESS PROPERTY

The Department of Defense delivers additional humanitarian support to allies and friends through the Excess Property Program. Over the years excess medical equipment, transport, administrative, and logistical materiel and general supplies have been offered at little or no cost to other nations. Hospitals, clinics, schools, and community facilities throughout the world have been equipped through this program. This support goes beyond funding provided through Foreign Military Financing, Economic Support Funds, and various other programs.

Since 1985, the Denton Amendment has facilitated the use of U.S. military aircraft to be used to transport humanitarian relief supplies and related cargo on a space-available basis in support of assistance programs. As a result, thousands of tons of cargo have been delivered, not only for U.S. government agencies but also for the United Nations, nongovernmental organizations, and private charities. Several years ago, for example, a U.S. Army officer working in Ukraine decided on his own to equip several medical clinics in small towns around the country. After soliciting donated equipment while on leave in the United States, he coordinated free transport under the Denton Amendment and practically established three Ukrainian medical facilities single-handedly.

The United States has been a major partner and supporter of regional and international relief and other humanitarian efforts. The Defense Department also provides logistical support and coordination for United Nations humanitarian missions. The United States participated in the highly successful Australian-led U.N. operation in East Timor -- considered to be a textbook example of effective multinational response.

There are many other areas where the U.S. military is involved. The U.S. Mine Action Plan has been operating for many years to mitigate the danger from mines and unexploded ordnance, some of which dates back to World War II or before. The result has been the reclamation of land that had been unsafe for decades.

Additionally, the U.S. Navy and Coast Guard perform hundreds of search-and-rescue operations every year. They have also provided assistance to ocean-going refugees who are at risk in overcrowded and unstable vessels.

Emergency assistance is often provided ad-hoc, but over the years an assortment of programs have grown into major cooperative training and education efforts. In addition to the International Military Education and Training program (IMET), which brings foreign military officers and other officials to the United States for instruction, a significant portion of the foreign military financing funds the U.S. provides to other nations is used for education, training, and enhancing civil support around the world. U.S. military medical training teams have deployed to almost a hundred countries, and foreign medical specialists receive training routinely in the United States. Similarly, deployed U.S. Special Operations Forces often conduct training or information campaigns in developing nations and regions, and their services are highly valued by U.S. ambassadors and country teams.

A POSITIVE DIFFERENCE

Helping others and building strong friendships are core values of the American people, and humanitarian assistance remains an important and highly visible expression of ways the United States can make a positive difference in the world. The Department of Defense has been a leader in these efforts, and its programs and operations have saved many lives and enriched many more.

The U.S. military has also benefited from its involvement in these operations. Many senior officials have developed life-long friendships with their counterparts.

Military personnel at all levels profit from these contacts, exchanges, and cooperative efforts. Such exposure promotes cultural sensitivity and new ways of thinking. Last, but not least, logisticians receive invaluable on-the-job training through rapid humanitarian deployments and operations conducted in often austere environments.

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(This article was republished from the November 2004 issue of the State Department electronic journal entitled "Improving Lives: Military Humanitarian and Assistance Programs." The journal may be viewed at: <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/1104/ijpe/ijpe1104.htm>. No republication restrictions.)

U.S. PLEDGES SMALLPOX VACCINE TO GLOBAL STOCKPILE

Stockpile designed to protect the world against outbreak, attack

The United States is pledging 20 million doses of smallpox vaccine to a global stockpile being accumulated by international agreement, U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) Tommy G. Thompson announced December 10.

The vaccine will be available for rapid dispatch to any nation in which a case of smallpox appears in a human being, according to an HHS press release. Smallpox was considered eradicated worldwide in 1980 but is now considered an agent that could be used in a bioterror attack.

Many nations have no stores of smallpox vaccine and could face a health crisis in the event of an attack. The international stockpile being accumulated by the World Health Organization (WHO) in Geneva is designed to reduce that vulnerability.

The effort is being coordinated through the Global Health Security Initiative, a multinational agreement under which nations strive to improve their response and readiness to the possibility of bioterror attack. Health officials from Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Mexico, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union and WHO have been pursuing the initiative since 2001.

The U.S. donation of vaccine to the stockpile is the largest yet made by a single nation, though it will remain in the United States, available for WHO use in the event of an emergency.

Background on smallpox is available at:
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/smallpox/en/>

Background on the Global Health Security Initiative is available at:
http://www.pei.de/bioweap/ghsi_workshop.htm

The text of the press release follows:
 December 10, 2004

United States Pledges 20 Million Doses of Smallpox Vaccine to Global Stockpile

PARIS--U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy G. Thompson announced that the United States is pledging 20 million doses of smallpox vaccine to the global stockpile managed by the World Health Organization (WHO). The United States donation is by far the largest contribution to date to the global stockpile.

"The United States is proud to make a significant contribution to a global stockpile that will serve as a critical line of defense in the event of a smallpox attack anywhere in the world," Secretary Thompson said. "This is an important step toward ensuring the health and safety of the American people."

Secretary Thompson also thanked and congratulated the governments of Canada, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom for their pledges to the stockpile.

At a 2003 Ministerial Meeting of the Global Health Security Initiative (GHSI), the United States encouraged its international partners to develop the WHO Smallpox Vaccine Bank, which would consist of a physical stockpile in Geneva and a virtual global stockpile of pledged vaccine stocks from around the world. This vaccine

stockpile could quickly dispatch vaccine to any country that might be experiencing an outbreak of smallpox.

Under the framework established by the WHO, governments or organizations can commit vaccine in their national stocks for the virtual global stockpile or provide vaccine or funds to the WHO Secretariat to purchase vaccine for the physical stockpile in Geneva.

The 20 million doses of vaccine pledged by the United States will physically remain in the U.S. Strategic National Stockpile, but will be available for the WHO to use in the event of an emergency. The global stockpile will be used only if at least one case of smallpox is confirmed in the human population.

The reemergence of smallpox in any country would constitute an international emergency and would pose a serious threat to the national security of the United States. Yet most countries, especially those in the developing world, have no smallpox vaccine and are not prepared to respond to an outbreak of smallpox. The WHO global stockpile addresses this vulnerability and ensures that the world is better prepared to deal with this threat.

Experts from U.S. agencies have worked with experts from the WHO and other countries on developing an operational framework for the WHO Smallpox Vaccine Bank, including establishing standards on vaccine potency, stability, and purity and addressing legal liability concerns. Further work remains in developing plans for vaccine delivery and distribution.

These efforts around the world complement the United States' ongoing efforts to prepare our homeland for a possible smallpox attack. Since 2001, the United States has dramatically improved its capacity to respond to this threat. In 2001, the U.S. had only 15 million doses of smallpox vaccine available in the U.S. Strategic National Stockpile. Today, there are more than enough doses to vaccinate every person in America, if necessary. If there is a release of smallpox in the U.S., HHS will immediately make vaccine in the stockpile available to the general public.

Secretary Thompson reassured Americans that the U.S. pledge to the WHO does not compromise in any way America's ability to provide vaccines for its own citizens in the event of a smallpox outbreak.

"We have stockpiled more than enough smallpox vaccine for every man, woman, and child in America," Secretary

Thompson said. "But in this age of global interconnect-
edness, we need to take extra steps to be prepared for
threats around the world."

The last case of smallpox occurred in the United States
in 1949, and the WHO declared the disease eradicated
worldwide in 1980. Vaccinations to prevent smallpox
have not been routinely administered in the United States
since 1972.

Secretary Thompson made the smallpox announce-
ment while meeting with foreign health ministers at the
GHSI's Fifth Ministerial Meeting in Paris. This week's
meetings also include discussions on improving pre-
paredness for a possible global influenza pandemic.

Founded after September 11, 2001, at the urging of Sec-
retary Thompson, the GHSI brings together the health
ministers of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan,
Mexico, the United Kingdom, and the United States, plus
the Health Commissioner of the European Union and the
Director-General of the WHO. It was formed to promote
collaboration in preparedness and response planning
for public health emergencies and potential bioterrorist
attacks.

Note: All HHS press releases, fact sheets and other press
materials are available at:
<http://www.hhs.gov/news>

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